stonewall reflection by Dave Hayward

From Riots to Rituals

Gay Rights from Stonewall to Marriage

WHEN THE RIOT AT THE Stonewall Inn exploded the night of June 27, 1969, I was a 19-year-old college student clawing my way out of the closet.

In 1969 there were no gay groups at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., a cosmopolitan urban campus if ever there was one. Four blocks from the White House, GW was the staging area for weekly Vietnam War protests, and one morning the D.C. police just said to hell with it and arrested everyone walking on campus. I was so glad I cut class and slept in that day.

One day in May after a futile stab at seducing my fraternity brother (who ended up coming out perfectly well without me), all I knew to do was to call the Mattachine Society, the sole gay rights group in D.C. Fired from the government for being gay, astronomer Frank Kameny founded a tiny gay lobbying group out of his apartment, and 40 years later Kameny is still fiesty and fierce and ferocious: our very own Gay George Washington.

"I'm homosexual and I feel very bad about it!" I blubbered to Kameny on the pay phone outside my dorm (all the better to preserve my precious closet).

"Why do you feel bad about it?" Kameny retorted in his inimitable bark.

Standing on the sidewalk I swore lightning seared me. Instantly I knew: I don't have to feel bad about being gay! As my sainted Irish grandmother would say: Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

I CRIED TO KAMENY ABOUT being lonely and loveless and lost, and he told me to go to the gay bars. That's all there was, as Mattachine seldom had its own events.

My favorite bar became one in downtown D.C. across from the Justice Department, where we imagined J. Edgar Hoover was spying on us from his penthouse office. Little did we know that ole J. Edgar was the consummate closet case himself.

A month later, Stonewall erupted. I read about it in the New York Times and thought, "Cool! Queers fight back and it's about time." It

Atlanta Pride parade, 1972

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was trippy to imagine being openly gay and demanding your rights. It also was — and is — very, very exciting.

It wasn't until January 1970 that the D. C. Gay Liberation Front convened in a raucous free-for-all at a warehouse in Georgetown. We debated about aligning ourselves with the Black Panthers, and some wanted all minorities to stand together, while others thought we should focus only on our own liberation (kind of like today).

As we screamed and yelled, at least lesbians and gay men were all together finally. It was surreal to be out in public in big bright open rooms, like the warehouse in Georgetown. No more secret love/we kiss in a shadow/ somewhere there's a place for us. We are here.

IN LATE 1971, I MOVED TO Atlanta and here we had debates about Yankee carpetbaggers taking over vs. sons and daughters of the progressive South holding sway. Despite those conflicts, again, we all agreed on the urgency for Gay Liberation here and now.

While the city too busy to hate refused the Georgia Gay Liberation Front a permit to march for the first Gay Pride in 1971, in 1972 we did march in the streets, and we did shake out about 500 folks with us, and we did garner major media in the press and on the radio and all the TV stations.

Gay Pride came and never went away.

Today we must remember we came out of a social revolution. We did not want to get married and we did not want to serve in the military and we did not want social approval. We envisioned ourselves an army of lovers creating our own open relationships and our own extended families, and every sexual act we shared was literally a blow for freedom. We made ourselves up in the absence of any role models.

It's wonderful that we now can codify our relationships in New England and in Iowa. Thank God we're also not felons anymore under the dead and gone sodomy statutes; as long as our love made us criminals, we couldn't advance. Yet, forever and fundamentally, two men together and two women together and two transpersons together is different.

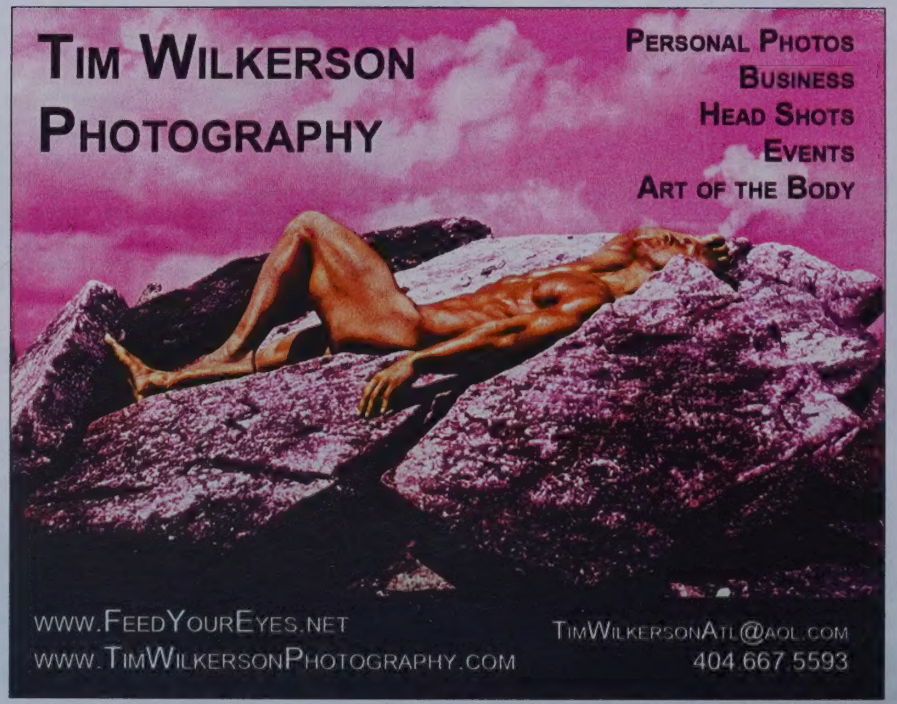
Sweet Gum Head drag show, 1972

As we aspire to equality, we are always our own non-gender comforming selves, sometimes in small ways, and sometimes in every way there is.

Long live our differences!

Dave Hayward is the director of Touching Up Our Roots, a local gay history project, www.touchingupourroots.org

Photos by Boyd Louis courtesy Dave Hayward



NEWS AROUND TOWN

compiled by David's staff

David
11/6/02

2002 WREATH COLLECTION EVENT THIS SUNDAY

DIFFA brings an installation and silent auction of one-of-a-kind creations by designers, artists, and other celebrated individuals. This year, the event is on November 10, from 6-8 p.m. at Phipps Plaza in Atlanta, Georgia. Stunning additions this year include live music by Elad, made-to-order evergreen wreaths designed exclusively for DIFFA by the Ritz Carlton-Buckhead, Christopher Radko ornaments, and a live auction. All auctions include many luxurious items in addition to the wreaths.

The wreaths will be on display November 1-10. For advanced ticket purchase, donations, or more information call 404-228-1950 or email Atlanta@diffa.org.

DIFFA stands for Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS. To find out more about this national organization go to www.diffa.org.

HOLLYWOOD DEPICTIONS OF GAYS EXPLORED IN "SCREENED OUT"

Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse will host a reading and signing of SCREENED OUT: PLAYING GAY IN HOLLYWOOD FROM EDISON TO STONEWALL by Richard Barrios on Saturday, November 9, at 1 PM. Outwrite Bookstore is located at 10th Street and Piedmont Avenue (also known as 'Queer Crossing') in Midtown. Out on Film, Atlanta's lesbian and gay film festival, is co-sponsoring the event.

Rapacious dykes, self-loathing closet cases, hustlers, ambiguous sophisticates, and sado-masochistic rich kids: most of what America thought it knew about gay people it learned at the movies. A fresh and revelatory look at sexuality in the great age of moviemaking, SCREENED OUT shows how much gay and lesbian lives have shaped the silver screen. Spanning popular American cinema from the early 1900s until today, distinguished film historian Richard Barrios presents a rich, compulsively readable analysis of how Hollywood has used and depicted gays, and the mixed signals it has given us. Some examples include: Marlene Dietrich in a top hat, Cary Grant in a negligee, and a pansy cowboy in THE DUDE WRANGLER. Such iconoclastic images, Barrios argues, send powerful messages about tragedy and obsession, but also about freedom, compassion, and even empowerment.

Richard Barrios is the author of A SONG IN THE DARK: THE BIRTH OF MUSICAL FILM. He holds degrees in cinema studies, music history, and literature and has worked in the film industry and music publishing. He is a native of Louisiana and lives in New York.

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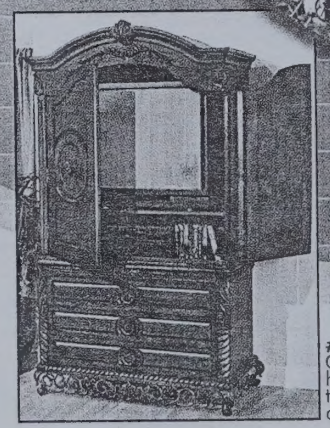

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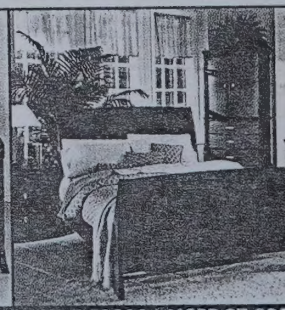

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